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**SLAVERY and ATTITUDES
on SLAVERY in
HUNTERDON COUNTY
NEW JERSEY**

By

HUBERT SCHMIDT

**FLEMINGTON
HUNTERDON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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SLAVERY AND ATTITUDES ON SLAVERY HUNTERDON COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

BY HUBERT SCHMIDT, NEW BRUNSWICK

THE RIGHT of one human being to possess another was not seriously questioned in Hunterdon County in the period before the American Revolution. Slavery in that area seems to have been quite extensive, though the ratio of Negroes to whites was probably never very large. Slaveholding on a large scale was unusual. The way in which later traditions stressed the large slave gang at Union Forge¹ perhaps allows the inference that it was unique. On the other hand, both tradition and documentary evidence show that there were a great many masters who owned one, two, or three slaves.

It is unfortunate that the abstracts of the probate records of the state do not always specify whether the various estates included slave property, but enough cases are given to indicate the small number of slaves held by most masters. For the period ending with the year 1780, the abstracts mention slaves for thirty estates clearly within present day Hunterdon County. In sixteen of these instances, only one slave is mentioned; in four cases, two are mentioned; in two cases, three; in two cases, four; in three cases, five; and in one case, six. A ferry at present day Lambertville used eight blacks, while Union Forge

¹"Traditions of Our Ancestors," *Hunterdon Republican*, Jan. 27, 1870.

used a force of eighteen Negro miners and iron workers.² Often a substantial part of the personal property of an estate was the one or two slaves which the deceased had owned. Human property was not restricted to the rich.

At the time of the first national census in 1790, there were in Hunterdon County, which at that time included two townships of present day Mercer, 1301 slaves in a total population of 20,153. This means that approximately one person in fifteen was a Negro slave. There were only 191 free blacks in the county. By 1800, the number of slaves had fallen slightly to 1220, while the total population had climbed to 21,261. The number of free blacks had risen to 520. This means that the slave ratio had fallen slightly, though the colored population had increased faster than the white. By this time, only seventy per cent of all Negroes were slaves. In 1810, there were in the county 1119 slaves and 687 free Negroes in a total population of 24,556, or 4.5 slaves and 2.8 free blacks in every one hundred persons.³

After that time, the slave population, which had been fairly constant, began to decline rapidly. By 1820, there were only 716 slaves in a total population of 28,604. On the other hand, free Negroes now numbered 1444, or two for every slave. The number of slaves had fallen to 171, of whom 131 lived in present day Hunterdon. There were 1770 free blacks, of whom 915 were clustered in the part of Hunterdon now in Mercer. That left 855 free Negroes within the present county limits, or thirteen for every two slaves.⁴

Before the next census, Hunterdon County had been whittled down to its present boundaries. The census of 1840 showed that the number of slaves had fallen to thirty-five, of whom thirteen lived in Raritan Township, in which Flemington was located. Other townships varied from no slaves in Kingwood to five in Amwell. The free black population had decreased

²*New Jersey Archives*, 1st S., XXIII, 49; XXX, 16, 114, 237, 259-60, 310, 352, 404, 456, 502; XXXII, 15, 16, 34, 36-37, 50, 62, 64, 107, 212, 268, 280, 372; XXXIII, 273, 378; XXXIV, 28-29, 373, 417, 468, 588, 603. Hereinafter cited as *N.J.A.*

³*Census of 1830*, pp. 6-7.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 6-7, 56-57.

to 778.⁵ By 1850, there were only four slaves in Raritan Township and one each in five other townships, a total of nine. There were now 808 free colored persons in the county.⁶ In 1860, four of New Jersey's remaining eighteen slaves had homes in Hunterdon County. The free Negroes now numbered 796.⁷

For all practical purposes, slavery was dead by 1850. The nine slaves of the county ranged in age from fifty-eight to ninety, and most of them were past the age of usefulness. Six townships had no slaves at all. Even the free Negroes were disappearing from the rural areas by this time. Lebanon Township had sixteen Negroes, Kingwood only eight.⁸ The sight of a Negro was a novelty in some neighborhoods. A small boy near Frenchtown had never heard of such a thing as a black man. When he saw his first Negro, he ran excitedly to his mother and proclaimed that he "had seen the devil himself down in the meadow by the goose's nest."⁹ The local slave issue was dead. The four ancient retainers still alive in 1860 were not economic assets to their masters. The institution of slavery had died a rather painless death in Hunterdon County.

The most potent factor in the rapid extinguishment of slavery was state legislation, which was, of course, itself a reflection of the changing popular attitude. At this point, a brief summary of the changes in the legal status of the institution seems pertinent.

The provincial slave code in New Jersey was harsh. The fundamental law was that of March 11, 1714. Slaves wandering from home were whipped, and their masters were required to pay the informers and the constables who applied the lash.¹⁰ The personal liberty of slaves was restricted in many ways. A law of 1751 specifically prohibited slaves "from meeting in large Companies, from running about at Nights, and from

⁵*Census of 1840*, pp. 128-29.

⁶*Census of 1850*, p. 139.

⁷*Census of 1860*, pp. 312-14.

⁸Hunterdon County census schedules (MS), 1850.

⁹George O. Vanderbilt, "Recollections along the Nesasacaway," *Hunterdon County Democrat*, Feb. 20, 1912.

¹⁰Samuel Allinson, comp., *Acts of the General Assembly of the Province of New Jersey* (Burlington, 1776), pp. 18-21.

hunting or carrying a Gun on the Lord's Day."¹¹ These colonial laws became a part of the state law, and were reaffirmed with modifications in the act of 1798 which summarized all legislation regarding slavery to date.¹² There are indications that these laws were winked at in practice during the later period in Hunterdon County and probably elsewhere.¹³

The attitude of New Jersey colonial law toward manumission is well expressed by a statement in the 1714 law, which read: ". . . it is found by Experience, that Free Negroes are an idle, slothful people, and prove very often a charge to the place where they are . . ." To prevent the eventuality thus expressed, the law required that persons of property must sign a "security" for the support of a freed slave. At the same time, it handicapped freedmen by not allowing them to own real estate.¹⁴ A law of 1769 reaffirmed the stipulation of "security" and named the specific sum of two hundred pounds.¹⁵ It is little wonder that few slaves were freed. A noteworthy case in Hunterdon County was one of 1744. A farmer provided in his will that at the death of his wife the slave, Primes, should be free and should have the use of a certain plot of land during his lifetime.¹⁶

Beginning about the time of the Revolution, there was a strong reaction against slavery in New Jersey. This was shown by the provisions of the law of 1786, which in its preamble contained a severe indictment of the institution, and by those of a supplementary law of 1788. Slave trade across state lines was rigidly prohibited. Cruelty against slaves was made an indictable offense, punishable by a fine of five pounds for the first offense, and ten for the second. Manumission was made easier. A slave between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five might be freed, provided that two township overseers of the poor would attest to his soundness of mind and

¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 191-92.

¹²William Paterson, comp., *Laws of the State of New-Jersey* (Newark, 1800), pp. 307-13.

¹³"Traditions of Our Ancestors," *Hunterdon Republican*, June 16, 1870.

¹⁴Allinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-21.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 316.

¹⁶*N.J.A.*, 1st S., XXX, 310.

body.¹⁷ The essentials of this legislation were repeated in the law of 1798. The age limit was increased to forty years. Nevertheless, some handicaps to wholesale manumission were retained. By the act of 1798, two owners of property must sign a bond for one hundred dollars that the newly freed slave would not become a public charge.¹⁸ Despite these hampering restrictions, the number of free slaves, as previously noted, was already considerable in Hunterdon County by 1800. An interesting feature of the law was the requirement, first made in 1786, that the slave must be taught to read. It is doubted that this provision was seriously enforced.

Slavery in New Jersey received its death blow in 1804 with the legislation entitled, "An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery." A child born of slave parents after July 4, 1804, was theoretically free, but was to remain a servant of his mother's master "in the same manner as if such child had been bound to service by the trustees or overseers of the poor." This servitude was to end at the age of twenty-five for males and at the age of twenty-one for females. The child of a slave must be registered with the county clerk by the master, but at any time before it was a year old he might signify his desire to abandon his rights, in which case the overseers of the poor might bind out the child to someone else. If he did not so signify, he must support the child for the regular period.¹⁹ In practice, these children were evidently considered as slaves, and were so counted by census takers. The Hunterdon County record has disappeared, but Mr. H. E. Deats reports that only some fifty or sixty slave children were so registered. This would seem to indicate that not all such children were registered, and that slavery in Hunterdon County was allowed to die out even faster than had been intended by those who drafted the law of 1804.

¹⁷*Acts of the Tenth General Assembly of the State of New-Jersey* (Trenton, 1786), pp. 239-42; *Acts of the Thirteenth General Assembly of the State of New-Jersey* (Trenton, 1788), pp. 486-88.

¹⁸Paterson, *op. cit.*, pp. 307-13.

¹⁹*Acts of the 28th General Assembly of the State of New-Jersey* (Trenton, 1804), pp. 251-54.

The laws of 1798 and 1804 and subsequent legislation of 1812 and 1818 were codified in the act of 1820. The 1818 law had made even more stringent the restriction against exporting slaves or colored servants from the state.²⁰ Later legislation was not too important in changing a trend already under way. The state constitution of 1844 stated that "all men are by nature free and independent," but the courts immediately upheld the right to property in slaves.²¹ The law of 1846, probably passed in order to rob the Abolitionists of their ammunition, theoretically abolished slavery in New Jersey. By this act slaves became "apprentices" for life under the same restrictions as if they were still slaves, and in practice they were still considered slaves. Another provision freed all children at birth.²² After this time, the legislators left slavery to die a natural death. Negro children were bound out, even after the Thirteenth Amendment was in effect, but were, legally at least, on the same plane as white apprentices.

Available evidence indicates that slaves in Hunterdon County were freed at a rate which outstripped the provisions of the law. The county book of manumissions has not been found, but study of 115 certificates of manumission which have been preserved indicates that a wave of reform struck the county soon after 1810. These certificates are from every part of the county. They were originally brought to the county clerk for recording, but the newly liberated slaves never bothered to redeem them by paying the necessary fee. The laws of 1798 and 1821 required that freedmen in order to be employed or to leave their home counties must have such certificates available. These provisions of the law were evidently disregarded by whites and blacks alike.

II

Information as to the types of work for which slaves were used is all too scanty. One of the best sources for Hunterdon

²⁰*Laws of the State of New Jersey, 1821* (Trenton, 1821), pp. 679-85.

²¹A. Q. Keasbey, "Slavery in New Jersey," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, 3rd S., V, 15-18.

²²*Statutes of the State of New Jersey* (Trenton, 1847), pp. 382-90.

County is the Capnerhurst (Capner) correspondence. This consists in part of several hundred letters, dated between 1785 and 1830, exchanged among various members of the English group in Hunterdon County and their friends and relatives in England, in Philadelphia, and on the frontier. The writers of these letters make frequent casual mention of their own slaves and those of their friends and neighbors. The usual female slave seems to have been a maid of all work and general helper in the household. Sometimes the Negro maid was looked upon as an indispensable member of the family.¹ Negro men, too, were often partially employed in the innumerable odd jobs and chores which went with the maintenance of a home in the days before our modern labor-saving devices.²

Most of the male slaves of the county were probably employed as farm hands. As stated before, the published abstracts of New Jersey probate records mention thirty cases in present Hunterdon County in which slaves were part of the estate. Most of the owners were evidently farmers. The records of the Case tannery, some forty volumes running from 1783 to 1851, show numerous examples of slaves on farms. The accounts of Dr. John Bowne, of present day Bowne Station, show between 1801 and 1818 dozens of cases in which the good doctor bled the slaves of his farmer neighbors or administered to them the cathartics and emetics which constituted the principal remedies of the time. Most of the eighteen owners of runaway slaves mentioned in extant copies of the *Hunterdon Gazette* between 1825 and 1843 were likewise farmers. Advertisements sometimes extolled a slave's agricultural abilities. A notice in a Trenton paper of 1781 reads as follows:

. . . A Negro Man and his Wife, with two male Children. The man is a complete farmer. The wench is a good dairy woman, and can wash, iron, and cook very well. They are honest and sober. Enquire of the Printer.³

¹Polly Choyce to Mr. and Mrs. James Choyce, Sept. 24-25, 1793; John Hall to Mrs. Thomas Capner, *circa* 1805.

²Mrs. Mary Capner to Mrs. Hugh Exton, May 18, 1788.

³*New Jersey Gazette*, March 7, 1781, *N.J.A.*, 2nd S., V, 205.

Negro farm hands were apparently allowed that freedom of action which it is often necessary to give helpers on a general farm, where the variety of tasks makes any other arrangement difficult. The account books mentioned above give numerous instances in which slaves ran errands and made trips with teams for their masters. In many cases, the transaction involved an exchange of money, thus showing the master's faith in the honesty of his servant.

Men of other occupations sometimes found it advantageous to keep a slave labor force, especially in earlier days when hired labor was scarce. Emanuel Coryell, a ferryman, had eight slaves at the time of his death in 1748.⁴ When John Opdycke, a miller, died in 1777, he left each of his three sons a mill and each a slave helper.⁵ The Case tannery near Flemington used one or more slaves.⁶ A widow in Bethlehem Township ran her deceased husband's still with slave labor.⁷ Occasionally, even artisans used slave helpers. An advertisement in 1753 mentioned that a runaway slave was trained as a cooper.⁸ Another, twenty years later, from Hopewell Township, now in Mercer County, advertised one of three Negro runaways as a shoemaker.⁹

The largest slave gangs were apparently used by the iron furnaces of the north part of the county prior to the Revolution. When Hacklebarney Forge sold at sheriff's sale in 1764, the advertisement mentioned "sundry Negroes, Women and Children."¹⁰ The Union Iron Works had a labor force of eighteen slaves in 1747;¹¹ just before the Revolution, it is said to have employed forty. When the war broke out, the Tory owners took the slaves out of the state to prevent their confiscation.¹²

⁴*N.J.A.*, 1st S., XXX, 114; Hannah Coryell Anderson, *General Washington at Coryell's Ferry* (1928), p. 6.

⁵C. W. Opdycke, *op Dyck Genealogy* (New York, 1889), pp. 259-64.

⁶Various letters of Mrs. Mary Capner, in Capnerhurst correspondence.

⁷*N.J.A.*, 1st S., XXXIV, 28-29.

⁸*Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 3, 1753, *N.J.A.*, 1st S., XIX, 257-58.

⁹*Pennsylvania Journal*, June 16, 1773, *ibid.*, XXVI, 535-36.

¹⁰*Pennsylvania Gazette*, March 1, 1764, quoted in Charles Boyer, *Early Forges & Furnaces in New Jersey* (Philadelphia, 1931), p. 82.

¹¹*N.J.A.*, 1st S., XXX, 259-60.

¹²Boyer, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

It became a tradition in the family of the man who was at that time superintendent that one of the Negroes escaped to the woods, that another was retained as a personal servant, and that the other thirty-eight were chained together and driven to Virginia.¹³

It was not unusual for a man to hire his slaves out to others. A typical case was shown by an entry in a miller's memorandum book in 1774, which read: "Ambrose Barcroft Allowed 6/ for black Jacks hawling logs to Snyders Saw mill 1/2 day . . ." ¹⁴ In 1813, one of Dr. Bowne's patients paid his bill by sending the doctor a Negro wench to serve as a maid at five shillings per week.¹⁵ Sometimes slaves were hired out for a term of years. In one case, two pickaninnies, whose master had died, were bound out until twenty-one years of age. One, born in 1805, would then be legally free. The other, born a little too soon to achieve freedom, would then revert to the estate.¹⁶

It is suspected that the practice of hiring Negroes out reflected to some degree the difficulty of always finding work for them to do. Unlike a hired laborer, a slave could not be dismissed when idle, but nevertheless went right on eating. We have already noted that many masters released their slaves when they might legally have retained them for life. It is possible that economic motives may have flavored their acts of kindness. A slave once past forty years of age must be supported for life. A laggard slave had no fear of being dismissed. The long term advantages of using hired labor probably constituted the underlying cause for the disappearance of slavery.

III

The lot of the slave in Hunterdon County was seldom a very hard one. Personal relationships between the slave and his master's family were naturally very close. Only a few stories of extreme cruelty have come down to us, but many traditions

¹³"Traditions of Our Ancestors," *Hunterdon Republican*, Jan. 27, 1870.

¹⁴"John Lambert's Almanack, 1774" (MS),

¹⁵Dr. John Bowne's accounts, Ledger B, flyleaf, p. 7.

¹⁶"Hannah Hankinson Her Book," a commonplace book of the Hankinson family, entry not dated.

bear out the supposition that the average slave was treated with kindness. Corporal punishment was administered on occasion, and a public whipping of disobedient slaves was sure to draw a crowd.¹ But personal influence and lighter punishments seem to have been the rule. The life of the ordinary slave was evidently a happy, carefree existence. Perhaps from lack of incentive, slaves often did not work as hard as their masters. The kinds of work which they liked best were such pleasant tasks as going to market. They were very much in attendance at the many community frolics, where they were allowed to mingle and drink grog with their betters. No neighborhood dance was complete without two or three Negro fiddlers and a circle of Negro onlookers. The noisiest, most excited spectators on general training days and at the crossroad tavern horse races were the blacks. No one had more receptive ears for local gossip than did the average dorky, or was more generous in sharing it with others. In many cases, the black servant was treated as a respected member of the family, and at death received a decent obituary notice in the local paper. Often these family retainers took the surnames of their masters, and persons of color bore such distinctive names as Ten Eyck, Van Derveer, Van Horn, Hoagland, and Apgar. The black slave was not considered the equal of his white master, but he did hold an assured place in the social structure, and by his own lights had many of the things which go to make for happiness.²

The feeling against Negroes as a race does not seem to have developed until the 1850's, and then largely as a result of the slavery issue in national politics. During the period of slavery in Hunterdon County, the terms "wench," "Negro man," and "person of color" were used with none of the malice later

¹Extracts from the diary of John Hall, Flemington, 1787, in *Hunterdon County Democrat*, Jan. 21, 1913.

²Capnerhurst correspondence; Rev. John Bodine Thompson, "Reading-ton Negroes," *Historical Discourses and Addresses Delivered at the 175th Anniversary of the Reformed Church, Readington, N. J., October 17th, 1894* (Somerville, n.d.), pp. 52-60; A. W. McDowell, "Pluckemin One Hundred Years Ago," *Our Home*, I (1873), 483; R. R. Honeyman, "New Germantown," *ibid.*, p. 123; "Sketches of Local History," clipping from the *Frenchtown Independent*, circa 1877; "Traditions of Our Ancestors," *Hunterdon Republican*, June 16, 1870; *Hunterdon Gazette*, Sept. 27, 1826, Oct. 28, 1828; *Hunterdon County Democrat*, June 15, 1870.

attached to the use of the word "nigger." In general, it seems that so long as the blacks "knew their place" the relationships between the races were harmonious. There seems to have been no opprobrium attached to a Flemington midwife's acting in her professional capacity for a slave woman in 1787,³ and Dr. Bowne evidently treated black and white patients alike.⁴ Still floating about are many stories in which Negroes were the butts of tavern jokes, but they evidently liked the attention and came back for more. However, the bitterness and strife of the 1850's resulted in a change of feeling toward the blacks. This is well shown in the diary of James H. Blackwell. He had been an indulgent and paternal master, and as late as 1856 reemployed the darky couple who had been lured away the year previous by the pleasures of small town life in Clinton. But his tolerance changed to disgust for all "niggers," especially after the start of the Civil War, which he regarded as purely and simply the result of abolition agitation.

On the other hand, despite occasional exceptions, Negro children, slave or free, did not often attend schools until a late date. In 1817, when the Presbyterian minister and the local teacher together started a Sunday afternoon school for Negroes at Flemington, the local opposition was so strong and a minority faction of the school board so vociferous, that they decided not to use the school building for their colored scholars. When a Sunday School was organized the following year, a separate class was provided for Negro children.⁵ Even as late as 1850, few blacks attended the schools of the county, according to the local returns of the census takers. In Raritan Township, with its Negro population of 117, not a single colored child went to school.

An interesting aspect of racial relationships is that of Negro participation in the white man's religious services. From the first, slaves seem to have been encouraged to adopt Christian tenets. The various New Jersey laws which forbade the

³Mrs. Mary Capner to Mrs. Hugh Exton, Dec. 27, 1787.

⁴Dr. John Bowne's accounts.

⁵George S. Mott, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Flemington, N. J., with Sketches of Local Matters for Two Hundred Years* (New York, 1894), p. 53.

Negroes to congregate together specifically stated that they should not be construed so as to prevent church attendance by the blacks. Perhaps it was thought that religion made slaves more tractable. It is said of Cuffy, a Negro of New Germantown: "He was a pious, exemplary black, who exerted a good influence over his colored friends."⁶

No church group of Hunterdon County seems to have barred Negroes from membership, although there is no mention of any colored members in the two small Episcopal congregations of the county. At the first recorded Lutheran baptismal service, in 1714, one of the three children baptised was a Negro. Her sponsors were a freedman and his wife, both good Lutherans.⁷ The one Quaker group was very friendly to blacks, but the records of the meeting do not specify as to the complexion of its members. The Dutch Reformed churches welcomed Negro members. Incomplete records of the oldest one, that of Readington, give between 1720 and 1894 the names of twelve slaves and seventeen free Negroes who were members.⁸ A historian of that church writes, "At Readington, blacks received communion after the whites were through. They also had their own graveyard."⁹ The Presbyterians, the most numerous sect of the county, included many colored members.¹⁰ The historian of the United First Presbyterian Church of Amwell, which began as a German Reformed church, reports that the revival of 1843 brought in twelve Negro converts. He writes, "The seats in the gallery to the right and near the pulpit were long appropriated by the colored people."¹¹ Such segregation seems to have been usual, but was probably as satisfactory to the blacks as to the whites. It is interesting to note that after 1853,

⁶McDowell, *op. cit.*, p. 532.

⁷Rev. Charles O. Thompson, *225 Years—A History of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Oldwick, N. J., 1939).

⁸Rev. John Bodine Thompson, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-60.

⁹Rev. John L. Stillwell, *Old Readington* (Somerville, 1935).

¹⁰John Bacher Kugler, *History of the First English Presbyterian Church in Amwell* (Somerville, 1912), pp. 182, 205-11; Charles S. Converse, *History of the United First Presbyterian Church of Amwell, N. J.* (Trenton, 1881).

¹¹Converse, *op. cit.*, pp. 16, 32.

the clerk of the last named church stopped designating Negroes as such in the church records.¹²

The records of the earlier Baptist congregations are rather scanty, and no historians of Baptist churches now within the county mention Negro members. However, old Hopewell Church, now a few miles outside of the county, had a large number of colored members.¹³ A diary entry of a Flemington man on August 5, 1811, casually remarks, "Heard a black man preach at the Baptist Church."¹⁴ Doubtless, the Baptists were as free in allowing Negro members as were other sects. The same thing must be supposed for the Methodists when they arrived. The largest Negro group of the county, that of Flemington, eventually organized their own African M. E. church.¹⁵

It is difficult to estimate the extent to which slaves were bought and sold in Hunterdon County. The advertisements of slaves for sale which have come down to us are few in number, but indicate that on occasion Negroes were sold as casually as farm animals. For example, in 1773, at a vendue in Amwell Township, "a likely Negro boy" was sold along with the stock, farm equipment, and household goods.¹⁶ A will of 1777 provided that a Negro girl was to be sold and the proceeds given to the grandchildren when they reached the age of eighteen.¹⁷ In a single letter from Flemington in 1787, the narrator of neighborhood affairs mentioned that a Mr. Williams had lately sold a twelve-year-old girl, that "Lawyer Smith" had paid one hundred pounds currency for a Negro man, and that a neighboring farmer had bought himself a farm hand.¹⁸ In 1815, a Flemington man paid \$180 "for a Black Woman named Rachail."¹⁹

¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 32 ff.

¹³"Records of the Old School Baptist Church, 1715-1810," *Town Records of Hopewell, New Jersey* (New York, 1931), pp. 132-35, 140, 149-51. Hereinafter cited as *Hopewell Records*.

¹⁴Diary of Peter Haward (copy).

¹⁵*Hunterdon County Democrat*, Dec. 11, 1877.

¹⁶*Pennsylvania Gazette*, Sept. 29, 1773, *N.J.A.*, 1st S., XXIX, 37.

¹⁷*N.J.A.*, 1st S., XXXIV, 417.

¹⁸Mrs. Mary Capner to Mrs. Hugh Exton, Dec. 22, 1787.

¹⁹Copy of receipt given by Thomas Capner.

In a scrap book made for the anniversary exercises of the Readington Reformed Church in 1894 are preserved seven bills of sale for slaves sold between 1805 and 1825. The "slaves for life," all young, brought prices up to \$300. A seven-year-old pickaninny, who would be free at twenty-one, brought only seventeen dollars. A fourteen-year-old boy, who would be free at twenty-five, brought \$130. His new master was bound by contract to teach him to read and write.

The first newspaper in present day Hunterdon County appeared in 1825. For something over ten years, advertisements of slaves for sale occasionally appeared. In one issue, two slaves were offered. One, who was described as "a healthy young black woman . . . principally employed in cooking and housework," had three and one half years yet to serve. The other, also a house worker, was a slave for life.²⁰ In 1831, a man in Clinton advertised thus: "For Sale the time of a Black Man Who has four Years to Serve. He has been accustomed to Farming."²¹ These examples are typical of slave traffic in its later days. The last sale which has come to light was one in 1836, in which was sold the three year term of servitude remaining to a young Negro. Evidently the lad was legally a bound servant. At any rate, he did not like his new master, and with one year yet to serve showed a clean pair of heels.²²

It would be interesting to know whether any attempt was made to preserve family ties in cases where slaves were sold. Mention has been made of one case in which a family was offered for sale as a unit, but that was apparently unusual. The various advertisements say nothing about the marital status of the slaves who were marketed. Among the cases already cited in the printed abstracts of wills, it is usually evident from the data given that the master did not own a compact family group. In one instance, a master held four Negro wenches and two Negro children, but no menservants.²³ The conditions indicated were hardly conducive to morality. In the minutes of the

²⁰*Hunterdon Gazette*, Sept. 1, 1825.

²¹*Ibid.*, Jan. 19, 1831.

²²*Ibid.*, Jan. 15, 1839.

²³*N.J.A.*, 1st S., XXXII, 107.

Hopewell church was written in 1769 the following terse notice of excommunication: "Nelly, a Black, for bearing a bastard child."²⁴ The fact that so many mulattoes are mentioned in various records points to considerable miscegenation. In 1831, a runaway wench carried with her her thirteen-months-old mulatto child.²⁵ The coming of freedom does not seem to have increased tendencies toward chastity. The local schedules of the census takers in 1850 mention many mulatto children. In the same year a farmer of present day Flemington Junction recorded in his diary without comment that his Irish farm hand had left hurriedly for New York and that his "coulered servent girl Tamer" had given birth to a child which was promptly named Florance Donavan.²⁶ Between 1795 and 1848, only twenty-three marriages were recorded at the office of the county clerk at Flemington in which the parties were labeled as colored persons. Though the list is undoubtedly incomplete, the smallness of the number would seem to indicate that the marriage ceremony was not thought too important for blacks, whether slave or free.²⁷

A final alternative for a slave who did not like his lot was that of running away. Of course, there was always the serious problem of where he could go for safety. That probably explains why the advertisements for runaway slaves in the newspaper extracts quoted in the *New Jersey Archives* are so few in number as compared to those for indentured white servants. The runaway mentioned in a 1749 advertisement was thought to have headed for Maryland.²⁸ Another master remarked that his slave, a cooper by trade, might well pass as a free Negro.²⁹ In one instance, a slave named Brunce had been practicing up on the use of a new name, Tom, before running away.³⁰ In 1793, Hannah, the trusty Capner maid, smilingly

²⁴*Hopewell Records*, p. 176.

²⁵*Hunterdon Gazette*, Sept. 21, 1831.

²⁶Diary of James H. Blackwell.

²⁷Hiram E. Deats, ed., *Marriage Records of Hunterdon County, New Jersey, 1795-1875* (Flemington, N. J., 1918), p. 329.

²⁸*Pennsylvania Journal*, June 8, 1749, *N.J.A.*, 1st S., XII, 544.

²⁹*Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 3, 1753, *ibid.*, XIX, 257-58.

³⁰*New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury*, June 6, 1768, *ibid.*, XXVI, 180.

said to the young niece of her mistress, "Do go, Miss Polly, and see Mrs. Hill, but if you don't come back tomorrow, I will run away."³¹ Hopes of acquiring permanent freedom were naturally alluring. If worst came to worst, the runaway could submit to capture and come back and take his medicine.

By the time of the first newspaper in Flemington (1825), runaway slaves were common. Each advertisement was headed with a neat little illustration of a Negro trudging along, all of his worldly goods wrapped in a handkerchief and carried at the end of a stick over his shoulder. It is not always clear whether the runaway was a slave for life, a slave till the age of majority by the law of 1804, or an "apprentice," bound out by the overseers of the poor. It is doubtful that in actual practice there was much distinction. One farmer spoke of "manumitting" his Negro bond servant.³² An example of a runaway "colored apprentice" occurred as late as 1867.³³

The slave advertisements throw some interesting sidelights on the period of slavery. In early days, there were occasional "new Negroes" who could not speak English.³⁴ And in one case, a slave spoke "low Dutch," but only broken English.³⁵ Many slaves bore the indelible marks left by smallpox.³⁶ Most of them wore the usual linsey and tow clothing of the working classes, but an occasional runaway was decked out in fancy frock coat, swansdown vest, or other cast-off clothing doubtless given him by his white master.³⁷ If the advertisements are any gauge, runaway slaves were not as lightfingered as were runaway white servants. The master to whom the runaway belonged did not usually seem very concerned about his loss. Sometimes he was very tardy about advertising.³⁸ Rewards were never large. In early days, the usual offer was twenty

³¹Polly Choyce to Mr. and Mrs. Richard Choyce, Sept. 24-25, 1793.

³²Diary of James H. Blackwell, entry of March 27, 1852.

³³*Hunterdon County Democrat*, Sept. 18, 1867.

³⁴*New York Mercury*, Nov. 9, 1761, *N.J.A.*, 1st S., XX, 629; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 11, 1765, *ibid.*, XXIV, 564-65.

³⁵*New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury*, June 6, 1768, *ibid.*, XXVI, 180.

³⁶*Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 3, 1746, Aug. 8, 1754, *ibid.*, XIII, 310, XIX, 383; *Hunterdon Gazette*, May 2, 1827.

³⁷*Ibid.*, May 2, 1827, Dec. 30, 1829, Jan. 26, 1842.

³⁸*Ibid.*, June 22, 1842.

shillings and reasonable charges, though an occasional master offered more. One irate owner, who figured that his slave had been coaxed away, offered three pounds for the return of the slave and an extra seven pounds for conviction of the thief.³⁹ In later days, it was common to offer a nominal reward of a few cents. By such an advertisement, the owner charged officers of the law with the task of apprehending the fugitive. Often it appeared that the chief reason for advertising at all was a desire to avoid obligations which the runaway might incur in the name of his master.⁴⁰ Slaves were evidently not considered very valuable. A Lambertville story has it that one runaway was very surprised to learn that his master had offered a reward. Escaping from his captors, he returned home under his own power.⁴¹

In many cases, the owner deliberately ran down the character of his slave in his advertisement. This probably indicates that the basic cause of the effort to escape was a lack of adjustment in personal relations. A master in 1754 described his Negro as "about 30 years of age, near five feet high, has a flat nose, much pock-marked, a lover of white women, and a great smoker . . ."⁴² One slave girl was described as having a "gloomy down Look."⁴³ In 1826, an owner described a young darky thus: "He has a down cast look, avoids looking a person in the face—and is very fond of liquor . . ."⁴⁴ The best example found of such defamation is an advertisement of 1838: ". . . Said Catherine is a noted liar, and will steal everything she can lay her hands on; and to say the least, this is the fair side of her character. . . ."⁴⁵ Those who emphasize the mutual benefits of slavery to master and slave seem to have forgotten the cases in which there was only antagonism between the two.

On the other hand, it is to be doubted that the average Negro gained much by becoming a free man. His freedom did not

³⁹*Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 11, 1765, *N.J.A.*, 1st S., XXIV, 565.

⁴⁰*Hunterdon Gazette*, Nov. 21, 1838, etc.

⁴¹*Ringos*, I (1889), 127.

⁴²*Pennsylvania Gazette*, Aug. 8, 1754, *N.J.A.*, 1st S., XIX, 383.

⁴³*Pennsylvania Journal*, June 8, 1749, *ibid.*, XIII, 544.

⁴⁴*Hunterdon Gazette*, Jan. 19, 1826.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, Nov. 21, 1838.

bring equality, and seldom were his relations with the whites so happy as before. This was probably true during the entire period under consideration.

A striking example to the contrary was that of the Aree van Guinea or Aray family of Readington Township in early days. "Harry from Guinea" may have been an Arab or Moor, as some of his neighbors thought, but more probably was "a very respected Negro," as has been said since. Provincial law to the contrary, he held considerable land. The first German Lutheran services in New Jersey are said to have been held in his home. His daughter belonged to the Dutch Reformed church at Readington, but the usual appellation, "colored," was not placed after her name. Tradition has it that the members of this family were on a social level with their white neighbors. If this is true, the Arays surmounted a very high barrier. Unfortunately for the social experiment, they moved from the county some years before the American Revolution.⁴⁶

There are a few stories, not too well authenticated, of Negroes at a later date working out for themselves a not unhappy place in society and in the economic structure. A pleasing tale is that of the Negro lad who was freed at nineteen, "married a wench of unuzual respectability," became a farmer and "a worthy citizen," and "raised a family of respectable children."⁴⁷ The census taker in 1850 noted that one Negro in Lambertville had real estate, valued at \$400. His oldest son was employed as an hostler. None of his eight children attended school.⁴⁸

Unfortunately, few freedmen seemed able to hoist themselves by their bootstraps. A lucky group were those who had paternal guidance during their period of transition. Doubtless many worked for their old masters or lived nearby. Dr. Bowne kept his freedman, Daniel Williams, as a handy man. He

⁴⁶Rev. John Bodine Thompson, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-60; Rev. Theodore Frelinghuysen Chambers, *The Early Germans of New Jersey* (Dover, N. J., 1895), p. 243; Rev. Charles O. Thompson, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷C. W. Larison, *A Skech [sic] of the Fisher Family of Old Amwell Township in Hunterdon County, New Jersey* (Ringoes, N. J., 1890), pp. 60-61. For another Negro success story, see *Hunterdon Republican*, March 17, 1870.

⁴⁸Hunterdon County census schedules (MS), 1850.

kept scrupulous accounts with him, even charging him for cast-off clothing.⁴⁹ James H. Blackwell, a farmer, helped his servant girl and her husband to start up housekeeping and gave both employment on occasion.⁵⁰ At Potterstown, a colored woman named Mat lived with the Wyckoff family for ninety-nine years as slave and freedwoman.⁵¹ An item in the *New-Brunswick Daily Fredonian* in 1868 shows a probably not unusual situation:

The last slave in Hunterdon County is a mulatto, familiarly known as "Bob," belonging to the estate of John Waterhouse, Sr., deceased, late of Rosemont. A home has been found for him during the past sixteen years in the family of Ingham Waterhouse, near Sandy Ridge, where he has been kindly treated and cared for. . . .⁵²

The extent of such paternalism is not known. At any rate, it was not a permanent solution. We have already noted the drift of the free colored population of the county toward the villages. The census of 1850 showed relatively few Negroes in truly rural districts. Those who remained were almost invariably farm hands. In the villages the blacks worked as day laborers or by the month in hotels, livery stables, taverns, etc. An irate Flemington man, waiting for his garden to be spaded, wrote, "All negroes are humbugs. No dependence to be placed upon them—."⁵³ In Lambertville, there were thirty-one Negroes in 1850. All adults with occupations were classed as laborers.⁵⁴ The colored population was gradually becoming a segregated group, seemingly doomed to the position of an inferior race, ignorant and despised. Better times might be ahead for them, but the first generations out of bondage were not to be envied. They might call their souls their own, but little else.

⁴⁹Egbert T. Bush, "The Records of an Early Physician," a paper read before the Hunterdon County Historical Society (no date given).

⁵⁰Blackwell diary, entries of July 4, 1855, Feb. 8, 9, 14, and Oct. 1, 1856.

⁵¹*Hunterdon County Democrat*, June 15, 1870.

⁵²*New-Brunswick Daily Fredonian*, April 1, 1868.

⁵³Blackwell diary, May 7, 1860. See also entries for April 22, 1862, and Nov. 29, 1865.

⁵⁴Hunterdon County census schedules (MS), 1850.

IV

THE FIRST GROUP in the county to whole-heartedly oppose slavery were the Friends of the Bethlehem Meeting at Quakertown. And even they on occasion had to recognize the institution, as when one of their members in 1744 acted as executor for an estate which included three slaves.¹ There are indications that these Quakers, either as a group or as individuals, helped free several slaves. A deserving Negro by the name of Mingo Whano by some means obtained his freedom, probably with Quaker help. He then purchased his wife and two children from their master for "seventy-five pounds proclamation money of New Jersey," and freed them at once. Copies of the manumission certificate and of the receipt given by the master were incorporated into the records of the Meeting. The receipt stated that the money was paid "in behalf of Mingo Whano." This was in 1797. In 1803, the manumission of a young Negro girl was recorded in like manner.²

There are a few scattered instances of a feeling against slavery by others at an early date. In 1784, Moore Furman, perhaps the foremost citizen of the county, showed his sentiments in a manumission statement:

To All Christian People To Whom These Presents Come: I, Moore Furman being convinced of the iniquity and inhumanity of slavery and desirous of discouraging the same have manumitted my negroman slave, Thomas, and do by these presents, manumit, set free and discharge my negro man Thomas from all bonds and slavery to me, my heirs and assigns forever . . .³

A commonplace book in the Capner household contained

¹*N.J.A.*, 1st S., XXX, 456.

²James W. Moore, ed., *Records of the Kingwood Monthly Meeting of Friends, Hunterdon County, New Jersey* (Flemington, 1900), p. 26. The Bethlehem Meeting became the Kingwood Meeting in 1748.

³*The Letters of Moore Furman* (1912), pp. 9-10.

among other poems and hymns one which is a bitter denunciation of slavery. It begins thus:

I [was] once posse[ss]or of my native plain
Content I triumph'd indigent and free
But wretched now I live a life of pain
For white man's land is naught but misery.

Joseph Capner manumitted his mother's trusty maid, Hannah, in 1799,⁴ thus putting into practice the thought of the above poem, though his nephew, Joseph Exton, was in 1850 the last slaveholder in Bethlehem Township.⁵ A similar anti-slavery poem was found in a commonplace book of the family of John Blackwell, long the county clerk of Hunterdon County. One verse reads:

Oh when shall Afric's Sable Sons
Enjoy the heavenly words;
And vassals long enslav'd become
The freemen of the Lord.

The Capners were Presbyterians, the Blackwells Baptists. Both of the above-mentioned commonplace books probably antedated 1800.

The attitudes of such leading families both influenced and reflected the feeling against slavery which helped bring about the law of 1804. It must be understood, however, that the movement was local in its application. There is no evidence in Hunterdon County, at any rate, that the wave of reform which freed the slaves was tied up with the idea of forcible abolition elsewhere than in this state. The slavery problem was sensibly settled in New Jersey by compromise between reformers and slave owners. Other localities might well have done likewise.

The move for manumission was tied up closely with Negro colonization, especially noticeable after the free Negro problem became pressing. In 1824, a joint resolution to Congress by the two houses of the New Jersey legislature suggested grad-

⁴"Traditions of Our Ancestors," *Hunterdon Republican*, June 16, 1870.

⁵Hunterdon County census schedules (MS), 1850.

ual abolition of slavery and colonization of all Negroes. In Hunterdon County, there was apparently much sentiment in favor of colonization. Charles George, the able editor of the *Hunterdon Gazette* from 1825 to 1838, was a warm supporter of the New-Jersey Colonization Society and gave it a great deal of free publicity at all times. A typical article in one of his early issues portrayed the need of funds for use in sending to Liberia a shipload of free Negroes. He pointed out that the already numerous free blacks could never hope for "equal privilege" here, and that due to lack of education and economic opportunity a very high proportion of them were in penal institutions.⁶ In February, 1828, he copied from the New York *Mirror* a long article, headed "Interesting to Free Persons of Color," which played up the wonders of Liberia.⁷ There was sufficient interest in the matter to warrant public lectures. A diary entry of 1839 reads, "A. D. Warren spoke in the Court House on the subject of Colonization of Free Colored people."⁸ Rev. Charles Bartolette, the Baptist minister at Flemington and Sandy Ridge, was long one of the leading proponents of colonization of free Negroes.⁹

At least one Negro of the county benefited by the colonization movement. He was the slave of Rev. Peter Studdiford of Readington, who manumitted him and may have helped him to get to Liberia. At any rate, this Negro, who bore the good Hunterdon County name of John L. Stryker, became a prominent merchant in that country and a correspondent of the New-Jersey Colonization Society.¹⁰

The movement for colonization slowed down in the forties. None of the county's editors opposed the idea, but no paper gave much space to it. An interesting development was the revival of the plan in new form during the late fifties. Thomas Bartow, editor of the *Hunterdon Republican*, favored purchase

⁶*Hunterdon Gazette*, April 28, 1825.

⁷*Ibid.*, Feb. 6, 1828.

⁸Diary of Peter Haward (copy), entry in Sept., 1839 (day of month not given).

⁹*Hunterdon Democrat*, July 12, 1843.

¹⁰Rev. John Bodine Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

of lands in Central America and colonization of all Negroes there.¹¹

The attitude of church groups toward slavery during most of the period was rather non-committal. Doubtless, individual ministers took part in the war on slavery in New Jersey. In 1818, the state organization of the Presbyterian Church adopted the following pronouncement: "It is the duty of all Christians to use their honest, earnest, and unwearied endeavors to correct the errors of former times, and as speedily as possible, to efface this blot on our holy religion, and to obtain the complete abolition of slavery."¹² Such activity as this pronouncement may have inspired was probably relaxed after passage of the law of 1820.

A little later, when the excesses of the Abolitionists were so universally condemned, most ministers seem to have kept off the subject. The Flemington papers occasionally reported sermons of the local ministers, but no sermon on slavery has been found. Rev. Bartolette, in a Fourth of July oration in 1843, made a statement, "Slavery in this country is inimical to free institutions," but his only suggestion was colonization, and there was no slightest hint of a desire for forcible abolition in his whole speech.¹³ Many ministers probably considered slavery immoral, but dared not take up so controversial an issue. To have done so would have split their congregations into opposing camps. One churchgoer deplored "an Abolition Resolution adopted by the Baptists at their State convention in 1856."¹⁴

A young minister, Rev. Robert Landis, who came to Bethlehem Presbyterian Church in 1844, dared to express his "inveterate hostility to slavery," besides advocating temperance and support of missions. In 1851 he wrote a book explaining why he was forced out by this congregation. In it he said, "The principles which I had . . . announced my intention of continuing to advocate, were at this time unpopular through that region. They were all *new* to the generation then on the stage." His chief troubles were caused by his temperance speeches, resented

¹¹*Hunterdon Republican*, Nov. 23, 1859.

¹²Mott, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

¹³*Hunterdon Democrat*, July 12, 1843.

¹⁴Blackwell Diary, entry of Nov. 2, 1856.

alike by the farmers who made "apple whiskey" and the tavern keepers who retailed it. However, he goes on to say, "My anti-slavery views likewise furnished . . . a plausible pretext for promoting dissatisfaction. It was at a time when such views were exceedingly unpopular in that region."¹⁵ A later minister at this church, Rev. J. G. Williamson, an exceedingly tactful gentleman who remained for over fifty years, is said to have opposed slavery,¹⁶ but his own statement is that he stayed off of "worldly topics" and stuck to sermons about "Christ and him crucified."¹⁷

After the start of the war, some individuals were less reticent, though the "nigger cause" was still unpopular in the county. It is said of one brave Methodist circuit rider, who preached regularly at Quakertown: "He fearlessly advocated freedom of slaves and the Union. He was drafted, but saved to the ministry when the church society paid his exemption fee."¹⁸ Another Methodist minister, Rev. J. P. Dailey, in a memorial sermon at the death of Lincoln, in speaking of Lincoln's early troubles as president, said: "Then slavery was the great difficulty, that some loved, some hated, but all feared. Who fears it now?" However, he was neither vehement nor vindictive, and praised Lincoln's forbearance. Rev. Thomas Swaim of the Flemington Baptist Church, in an address on the same day, said "Long and hard did our faithful chief try to save the Union with Slavery." Neither he nor the Presbyterian minister, Rev. J. L. Janeway, himself a war veteran, attacked either the South or the now dead institution of slavery. The emphasis in these memorial sermons, as during the war, was put on the importance of preservation of the Union.¹⁹

¹⁵Robert Landis, *Bethlehem Church and Its Pastor* (1851), pp. 13, 17.

¹⁶"Address of T. Edgar Hunt, M.D.," *Sermon Delivered August 7th, 1889, by Rev. J. G. Williamson, Pastor of Bethlehem Presbyterian Church. . . With Addresses by Rev. Messrs. Mott, Blauvelt, Ewing, Davis and Kline and Drs. Race and Hunt* (Clinton, N. J., 1889), p. 33.

¹⁷Rev. J. G. Williamson, *Commemorative Services, Fiftieth Year as Pastor* (1899).

¹⁸Rev. R. Wesley Smith, *One Hundredth Anniversary of the M. E. Church at Quakertown, 1836-1936*, p. 7.

¹⁹*Discourses Memorial of Abraham Lincoln . . . by the Pastors of the Different Churches on Wednesday, April 19th, 1865* (Lambertville, N. J., 1865).

The point of view of the county newspapers is much easier to determine than that of the ministers. Charles George of the *Gazette*, though he favored colonization, was extremely non-committal on slavery itself. John S. Brown, who succeeded him in 1838, during his five years, made the paper definitely a Whig organ. The dominant Democrats of the county, in self defence, started the *Hunterdon Democrat*, with George C. Seymour at the helm. One of the points of contention which these two hothead editors bandied back and forth was the slavery issue. Each constantly claimed that the party of the other was guilty of trucking with the Abolitionists and defended his own party from such dire accusations. An amusing part of the quarrel was the squabble in 1839, which lasted for some months. It started with an announcement by Seymour that he burned at once all copies of the *Emancipator* which were sent to his office. Brown caustically remarked that the Democrats had been glad to get Abolitionist votes in a recent election in Ohio. Seymour countered and the fight was on, with no holds barred.²⁰

With a change of editors in 1843 came a change of policy on the part of the *Gazette*. Henry C. Buffington for a time steered clear of the slavery issue, but his handling of news betrayed his personal views, as when he pictured the horrors of the slave trade.²¹ The Mexican War brought him out into the open. He bitterly opposed the war as an act of aggression and because it might lead to the spread of slavery. He praised the Democratic New Brunswick *Times* for "striving for the right in defiance of party."²² He bemoaned the failure of the Wilmot Proviso and the intention "to purchase territory now Free and make it Slave."²³ In the 1848 election he supported Taylor as a man who would keep the "slave power" in check.²⁴ For ten years, he was Hunterdon County's bitterest opponent of the spread of slavery, though not an Abolitionist. His long campaign did the Whigs no permanent good, but may have

²⁰*Hunterdon Democrat*, March 26, 1839, and following issues; *Hunterdon Gazette*, April 2, 1839, and following issues.

²¹*Hunterdon Gazette*, March 18, 1846.

²²*Ibid.*, Feb. 10, 1847.

²³*Ibid.*, March 10, 1847.

²⁴*Ibid.*, Sept. 13, 1848.

paved the way for the growth of the Republican party in the county.

When Buffington left for greener pastures in March, 1854, the *Gazette* came under the control of Willard Nichols, whom Buffington described as a "Henry Clay Whig." Nichols followed his predecessor's lead at first, and waged bitter war on Douglas, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the spread of "that detestable institution," slavery.²⁵ But very shortly he began a shift of policy as a result of which the *Gazette* became a Know-Nothing organ. When making the shift, he apologized that the new party tolerated slavery. He said, "Slavery is a blasting curse, and a political engine of dangerous power, yet we shall support this platform until a better one is presented."²⁶ Even after this, he saved part of his venom for "border ruffians" and disunionists, though more space was given to attacks on Catholics and foreigners. Nichols attacked the Republicans and Fremont chiefly on the grounds that they did not stand for "American" principles and because Fremont had reputedly been a Catholic. Nichols had only hatred for Abolitionists, as treasonable and irreligious men.

In October, 1857, the paper again came into Whig hands. For three years, its chief editor, Alexander Suydam, fought a losing fight, caught between the cross-fire of the Democrats and Republicans. He stayed away from the slavery issue, and belabored his enemies of both parties as trouble makers.²⁷ The election of 1860 proved his undoing. He came out early for the Bell-Everitt ticket,²⁸ but in order to help fight the "Black Republicans" and the "Lincoln danger," he switched to support of Douglas along with the New Jersey wing of his party.²⁹ His dominant theme was to put love of the Union above partisanship. After the election, there was no place for a Whig editor in Hunterdon County, and under new management the *Gazette* became non-partisan. Eventually, in 1866 it fell into Democrat hands.

²⁵*Ibid.*, Oct. 25, Nov. 1, 1854.

²⁶*Ibid.*, June 20, 1855.

²⁷*Ibid.*, Oct. 24, 1857.

²⁸*Ibid.*, May 16, 1860.

²⁹*Ibid.*, Oct. 24, 31, 1860.

The *Hunterdon Democrat* steered a more consistent course. Seymour remained in charge until 1849. He and his successors to 1860 were faithful followers of the pronouncements of their party. In 1843, Seymour staunchly supported the arguments of Hon. Isaac G. Farlee, a Hunterdon County man then in the House of Representatives, that Congress could not abolish slavery in the territories, though like Farlee he opposed the Gag Rule.³⁰ In 1850, his successor followed the lead of the New Jersey Democrats in supporting the Compromise. In 1854, the paper supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and after that stayed with Douglas to the bitter end in 1860. Hatred of abolitionism was a persistent theme, and the epithet, "Abolitionist," was a handy one with which to label the Republican party. To this was gradually added the policy of stirring up race hatreds by dwelling on stories of miscegenation, criminal attacks by Negroes, etc.³¹ The free state men in Kansas were considered guilty of starting a civil war.³² Henry Ward Beecher, because of his "holy rifle" statement, was branded as a "moral monstrosity."³³ The ultimate in defamation of character was to say of a man that he was "a Freesoiler, Abolitionist, Maine Law man, and Black Republican."³⁴

Before the election of 1856, the *Democrat* clarified its position by making the following statement:

It will be remembered that the Democratic party is neither a slavery nor an antislavery party. It upholds the principles of the Constitution and all its compromises and guarantees in good faith. . . . It has been the policy of the Democratic party to regard the people of a Territory when organized like the people of a State, capable of self-government.³⁵

After the election, the editor changed his tone. He jubilantly declared, "Buck and Breck Elected. A Bachelor in the White House and the old Maids Tickled to Death. Black Republicans Gone up Salt River. . . . Mule Beef and Grasshopper Pie

³⁰*Hunterdon Democrat*, Dec. 13, 1843.

³¹*Ibid.*, Aug. 9, Oct. 8, 25, 1854, etc.

³²*Ibid.*, Aug. 27, 1856.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴*Ibid.*, Oct. 15, 1856.

³⁵*Ibid.*, Oct. 29, 1856.

Not so good as it Used to Was. 'Bleeding Kansas' a Dry Bob. The People Have Spoken, the white man decided good as nigger."³⁶ In 1858, the editor made a plea to the Anti-Lecompton Democrats to rejoin the party, now that the Kansas issue was dead.³⁷ In the 1860 election, he said, "Negro equality and an 'irrepressible' war seems to be the two principal ideas of the leading Republicans," and hailed the fusion of the two wings of the Democrat party and the Bell supporters in New Jersey as a "Union for the Sake of Union."³⁸ The Republican victory came as a great shock, but when the South seceded the editor could claim the gift of foresight.

During the period of the Civil War, the editor of the *Democrat* was Adam Bellis. Under his direction, the paper became a rabid Copperhead sheet, opposed to everything done by the "Abolitionist" government. The war was a useless slaughter, the draft was illegal, the governmental method of financing the war would ruin the national economy, and all government departments were full of corruption. McClellan and Vallandigham were the great heroes. Bellis accused his opponents of "negro infatuation" and of favoring miscegenation. When a New Germantown minister at communion administered the bread and wine first to an "American citizen of African descent," Bellis angrily accused him of making the Negro superior to the white man.³⁹ When it became apparent that the slaves were to be freed, he was certain that the underlying cause of the war had now been revealed. In 1865, when votes for Negroes were foreseen, Bellis shouted, "Hurrah for the new nation of black-white men."⁴⁰ Because of the unrelenting spirit of the *Democrat*, it was called "the organ for the Hunterdon wing of the Rebel army," by the Belvidere *Intelligencer* months after the war was over.⁴¹

In 1856, the rising Republican faction in Hunterdon County started a newspaper, the *Hunterdon Republican*. Its editor,

³⁶*Ibid.*, Nov. 12, 1856.

³⁷*Ibid.*, Nov. 2, 1858.

³⁸*Ibid.*, Sept. 12, Oct. 10, 1860.

³⁹*Ibid.*, April 20, 1864.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, Jan. 21, 1865.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, Jan. 10, 1866.

Thomas Bartow, was an able man and used well all the arguments of his party. He hotly denied any leanings toward abolitionism, and characterized it as "that hideous monster against which no party has been and is more bitterly and more efficiently opposed than the Republican party."⁴² On the other hand, he preached, day in and day out, against any further extension of slavery. In his last issue before election day in 1860, he urged voters that a Republican victory was "the only thing that will restore peace to the country and quiet the agitation of the everlasting (?) nigger question."⁴³ He evidently underestimated Southern determination. During the war, the *Republican* supported the Lincoln government at every turn.

Consideration of a newspaper which was non-partisan in outlook will round out the picture. In 1858, B. B. Blackwell started the *Lambertville Press* as a "non-partisan and non-sectional" sheet. Within a year, he claimed the largest circulation among the papers of the county. His rapid rise was doubtless due in part to the fact that he was a live wire and an able salesman. But it is suspected that many people of moderate views took the *Press* because they were glad to get hold of a paper which steered a careful middle course on the great controversial issue and which had no political axe to grind.

This does not mean that Blackwell avoided mention of slavery. He printed readily news which was concerned with the institution, and expressed his views openly. He looked upon the Walker filibustering expedition as pure piracy, but did not couple it with Southern expansion.⁴⁴ He copied from the *Detroit Free Press* a story headed, "Elopement of a Rich Heiress with a Nigger," and spoke of such miscegenation as the "practical fruits of abolitionism."⁴⁵ He sneeringly referred to Negroes as "cullud pussons."⁴⁶ At the time of John Brown's raid, he printed a history of servile insurrections in the South, and laid them largely at the door of "abolitionists and fanatics of the

⁴²*Hunterdon Republican*, Oct. 29, 1856.

⁴³*Ibid.*, Nov. 2, 1860.

⁴⁴*Lambertville Press*, Dec. 16, 1858.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, Jan. 27, Feb. 3, 1859.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, Aug. 25, 1859.

North.”⁴⁷ From the time of the raid, to that of Brown’s execution, he printed the news in a manner very hostile to Brown.⁴⁸ On the other hand, he opposed opening the slave trade, and printed news of captured slavers and missionary letters which portrayed the horrors of the human traffic.⁴⁹ He even spoke of slavery as an “abomination of the age.”⁵⁰ But he would never have lifted his hand against the institution or against its spread. He was patently following a middle course. Yet, from the moment South Carolina seceded, the *Press* was up in arms to save the Union.

To get at what the people of the county were thinking is a harder matter. As indicated previously, it is doubted that the early crusade which freed the slaves of New Jersey was coupled with any desire to forcibly free the Negroes of the South. Doubtless many wished that the curse was gone, but their own free Negro problem gave them understanding of the social implications involved. The New Jersey plan was one of gradual manumission and was tied up with the hope that the whole race problem could eventually be solved by colonization. But in an era of states’ rights, no one would venture more than cautious advice that other states try the same methods.

At any rate, there was little use for the Abolitionists in Hunterdon County. Garret D. Wall, United States Senator from New Jersey, was a close friend of various leaders of the dominant Democrat party in Hunterdon County. His Senate speech of February 29, 1836, was later distributed through the state in pamphlet form. Of abolitionism, he said:

Sir, we all, north and south, abhor abolition incendiarism. . . . I can assure the honorable Senator from South Carolina, that in the State which I have the honor in part to represent, I know no abolition incendiary—I have never known one, however desirous many citizens may be to see the abolition of slavery. No one there would dare to avow, that to accomplish it, he would dissolve or even put in hazard the Union, and the peace and security of our Southern brethren. The danger, Mr.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, Oct. 27, 1859.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, Oct. 27-Dec. 10, 1860.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, July 28, Dec. 28, 1859.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, June 27, 1860.

President, at present is not from the abolitionists, but from agitation and excitement.⁵¹

Time did not apparently make the Abolitionists more popular in Hunterdon County. No local newspaper supported their views, and no records of abolition speeches have come to light. To the very last, the people seem to have been surprisingly objective about the whole matter. The Frenchtown debating club argued the point of whether John Brown should be executed and decided that he should not.⁵² As late as January, 1860, the debating society at Locktown debated the question, "Should Slavery be abolished in the United States," without starting a riot. The negative side won.⁵³ A prominent Democrat in a speech at Quakertown late in the same year stated, "There is no class of people, of the same number, on the face of the earth, who enjoy as much happiness as the slaves of the Southern States." The *Hunterdon Republican* caustically commented that it was not fair for them to be so happy and suggested that they and their masters change roles periodically.⁵⁴ It would be very interesting to know the opinions of the oracles among the frequenters of the crossroads taverns and the loafers of the village stores.

The question of the extension of slavery was a different matter. Some indication of the feelings of the people at different times can be gained from a study of the election returns. It is well to note at the start that the Democrats of the county were dominant throughout the period, except in 1854. The Free Soil party was never very strong. In 1848, the local Whigs stole their thunder by constantly preaching that Taylor would stop the spread of slavery. However, Cass carried the county by a vote of 3220 to 2191, while the Free Soilers polled nine votes.⁵⁵ The Democrats claimed that their sweeping vic-

⁵¹Garret D. Wall, *Speech of Mr. Wall, of New Jersey, on the Memorial of the Caln Quarterly Meeting of the Society of Friends, of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Praying for the Abolition of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the District of Columbia. In Senate, February 29, 1836* (Washington, 1836).

⁵²*Lambertville Press*, Dec. 7, 1859.

⁵³*Hunterdon Republican*, Jan. 13, 1860.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, Dec. 21, 1860.

⁵⁵*Hunterdon Gazette*, Nov. 8, 15, 1848.

tory in 1852 was an indorsement of the Compromise of 1850.⁵⁶ It probably was that. But many Democrats could not swallow the Kansas-Nebraska Act, though Dr. Samuel Lilly of Lambertville, then in Congress, voted for it. The Anti-Nebraska Democrats made considerable noise,⁵⁷ and combined with the Whigs in the elections of 1854 to sweep the Democrats out of power. Most of the returns were close, but Dr. Lilly received only 2463 votes to 2820 in Hunterdon County.⁵⁸ Evidently the people of this area did not relish the repeal of the Missouri Compromise.

The election of 1856 showed that a substantial number of people were willing to stand up with the party which opposed the spread of slavery, even though they were accused of being Abolitionists. Fremont received 1554 votes to 3479 for Buchanan and 1105 for Fillmore.⁵⁹ In 1858, the county again went Democratic, but by only some four hundred votes this time.⁶⁰

As the 1860 election drew near, people were shaken by the "interminable Slavery agitation" and "apprehension for the safety of the Republic."⁶¹ The Democrats believed that only the election of Douglas could save the Union, while the Republicans claimed that their success would solve the "nigger question." The Whigs indorsed Douglas. The Whig-Democrat combination in Hunterdon County defeated the Republicans 3619 to 2827.⁶² Thus did the people choose a middle course which supported the Union and registered disapproval of "hot-heads" and "radicals" alike. At the same time, the election showed that a great many people were willing to risk the Union in order to prevent slavery from dominating a larger part of the nation.

All things considered, Hunterdon County was surprisingly

⁵⁶J. R. Thomson, *Speech of the Hon. J. R. Thomson, of New Jersey. Delivered in the Senate of the United States on Tuesday, Feb. 28, 1854, on the Nebraska Bill* (Washington, 1854), p. 1.

⁵⁷*Hunterdon Gazette*, Oct. 25, 1854.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, Nov. 15, 1854.

⁵⁹*Hunterdon Democrat*, Nov. 12, 1856.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, Nov. 10, 1858.

⁶¹*Lambertville Press*, Feb. 8, 1860.

⁶²*Hunterdon Democrat*, Nov. 14, 1860.

loyal during the war. But that fact did not make the people love the Abolitionists, the Republicans, or the Negro race. On April 22, 1861, James H. Blackwell wrote in his diary, "The Abolitionists have got us in a lead muss—and we must fight out of it the best we can." After the defeat at Bull Run, he wrote, "O! the curse of Abolitionism!" On June 8, 1864, he recorded, "We have just heard by a telegram that His Imperial Highness Abraham Lincoln, the rail Splitter, and union divider has received the nomination of reelection to the presidency of the United States—God save the country—from the hands of the Userping Tyrant." When the telegraph brought the news of Lincoln's death, he wrote one word of comment: "Retribution."

In 1862, a speaker at Clinton advocated immediate emancipation of the Negroes and harsh treatment of conquered territory. Most of his audience walked out.⁶³ A Tewksbury Township man wrote in a letter, "We hope to live long enough to see the Abolition party defunct, and all the States united under the 'Union as it was, and the Constitution as it is.'"⁶⁴ In the spring of 1864, the Democrats swept nearly all of the town meetings of the county. The *Hunterdon Democrat* said that the people were not ready for miscegenation yet.⁶⁵ James H. Blackwell exulted in his diary, "The Abolitionists didnt get nary an officer not even a pound Keeper." Just before the presidential election, one of the largest crowds ever in Flemington saw an elaborate McClellan parade.⁶⁶ McClellan swept the county by a vote of 4335 to 2631.⁶⁷ The people were not disloyal to the Union, but they hated the party which had caused what they regarded as useless bloodshed. Hatred of the Republican party, active dislike for Negroes, and sympathy for the whites of the South were characterstic of Hunterdon County long after the war was over.

⁶³*Hunterdon Democrat*, Nov. 12, 1862.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, Sept. 12, 1862.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, April 20, 1864.

⁶⁶Blackwell Diary, Nov. 3, 1864.

⁶⁷*Hunterdon Democrat*, Nov. 16, 1864.



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